The Campaign for
College
Opportunity

GUIDED PATHWAYS

Redesigning California's Community Colleges

Lessons Learned from Three Pioneering Campuses

January 2020

Community colleges play a critical role in providing access to higher education for over two million Californians seeking an educational foundation that will prepare them to transfer to a four-year university or to participate in the workforce.[1] However, community colleges have not always delivered on that promise—fewer than half of students who enroll in a California Community College will complete an associate's degree, certificate, or transfer within six years.

Enter Guided Pathways.

In 2015, Thomas Bailey of the Community College Research Center, together with Shanna Smith Jaggars and Davis Jenkins, released *Redesigning America's Community Colleges: A Clearer Path to Student Success.*[2] In the book, the authors suggest that community colleges could drastically increase rates of student success if they are willing to rethink the ways in which they organize programs of study, support services, and instruction.

The authors note that community colleges were originally designed to expand college enrollment at low cost, not to maximize completion. The result was a "cafeteria-style" model that colleges operate under today whereby students enter college with a long menu of program and course choices but very little direction. The results are low completion rates, extended time to degree, and a less than cost-efficient system.

Guided Pathways is a response to this cafeteria-style model. Guided Pathways is about fundamentally redesigning college campuses to provide structure and direction for students by organizing courses, programs, services, and supports into clear pathways that help students meet their educational goals.

The Four Pillars of Guided Pathways[3]

Create clear curricular pathways to employment and further education	Help students choose and enter their pathway	Help students stay on their path	Ensure that learning is happening with intentional outcomes

In 2016, the American Association of Community Colleges selected 30 institutions across 17 states to explore and implement Guided Pathways reforms in order to address attainment and other issues they might be facing.[4] Three community colleges in California were selected as part of the initial pathways project:

- **Bakersfield College**
- **Irvine Valley College**
- **Mt. San Antonio College**

While each college has taken a different approach to implementing Guided Pathways, specifically tailored to their college's needs, they are all approaching this endeavor to rethink student success. The following profiles illustrate why each college decided to implement Guided Pathways, steps they took to gain broad-based support on campus for Guided Pathways, how they are redesigning their college, and the initial results they are observing.

Bakersfield College

Established in 1913, Bakersfield College (BC) is one of the nation's oldest continually operating community colleges. The college serves 33,000 students annually across several campuses.[5] Classes at BC are offered on a traditional 16-week semester calendar as well as in a variety of non-traditional scheduling options: evenings, weekends, short-term vocational programs, and online.

BC is dramatically changing the way they approach student achievement on campus, and it all started with a book club. Dr. Sonya Christian, President of Bakersfield College, asked faculty and staff to join her in reading *Redesigning America's Community Colleges* and discussing what this type of reform would mean for their students. The result? A series of campus-wide meetings and learning institutes involving students, faculty, and administrators aimed at exploring whether such an approach would be beneficial and feasible at BC and, if so, what it would take to transform the college.

For a campus that serves 33,000 students in the heartland of California, many of whom are first-generation college students, re-envisioning how to more effectively deliver post-secondary education presented an opportunity to increase student achievement. After all, BC was struggling with many similar challenges confronted by other community colleges across the state.

Students were taking too much time to get through college. By accumulating more units than necessary (on average, 92 units before completing their AA degree when only about 60 units are necessary), BC students ended up over-spending on their education and, unfortunately, too many were not transferring or graduating.

Staff looked at data to create a baseline understanding of where their students were and where they needed to focus interventions. Of the 24,384 students enrolled in BC in 2012, by 2016 only 3,604 students received a certificate, degree, or transferred; 1,352 completed skills building courses; and another 1,220 came into the college as life-long learners. The remaining 80 percent of students had not graduated or transferred.

That 80 percent became their target for Guided Pathways.

Implementing Guided Pathways at Bakersfield College

Based on the collective decisions that were made during the Guided Pathways campus-wide meetings and learning institutes, and informed by data, BC has made significant strides in moving the campus towards Guided Pathways—the first community college in California to do so.

The biggest shift BC undertook was marrying the student services side of the college with the academic side through a high-tech, high-touch approach. **To effect this change, faculty had to rethink their approach to developing a syllabus by building in support services for students.**

Technology needed to be integrated into this new approach so students and faculty could communicate more seamlessly and in a timely manner. Faculty now send students weekly emails to congratulate them on achievements or encourage them to seek extra support. Students are given an education plan for their specific pathway, which also has student support services built into it. And finally, as part of the new student summer academy, "Bridge to BC," students are taken on a campus tour before starting their classes so they can know where the writing and tutor centers, financial aid office, and other student services are located.

Under Guided Pathways—every decision is intentional and integrated to help students succeed.

The college also started using **multiple measures** for assessing and placing incoming students. Too many students were being placed in remedial education courses, which created lag time and hurdles for students to overcome before they were even taking college-level courses. This reform, coupled with the intentional student support services, ensures that more students are not stuck taking remedial college courses for far too long.

BC developed and introduced **10 Learning and Career Pathways (LCPs)**, a cornerstone of Guided Pathways. The goal behind these pathways, which are dubbed "metamajors" in *Redesigning America's Community Colleges*, was to help students make better sense of their options and group degrees and certificates around interest areas. If students walk onto campus without knowing what degree they want, but they have a sense of the type of work they want to be doing post-college, the LCPs help them pick a path that aligns with their interests. The pathways also help students make sense of their general education courses.

The college also built a **completion coaching team** around each LCP. Faculty with specific expertise in a certain subject serve as coaches for their pathway to help students navigate their college path. One problem that BC acknowledged is that they have about 1,500 students per counselor, which creates barriers for students needing guidance and mentorship. But with coaches within each LCP, faculty are partnering with counselors to create a safety net for each LCP to ensure students do not get lost.

In addition to the 10 LCPs, BC also organized completion coaching communities around **affinity groups**. An affinity group is a population of students who have experienced inequity and/or have specific needs. Currently, BC has eight affinity groups:

Learning and Career Pathways

- Agriculture, Nutrition, and Culinary Arts
- Arts, Humanities, and Communication
- Business
- Education
- Health Services
- Industrial Technology and Transportation
- Public Safety Training
- Social and Behavioral Sciences
- Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
- Personal and Career Exploration

Affinity Groups

- African American Initiatives
- Athletes
- Undocumented Dreamers
- EOP&S
- Foster Youth
- Students with Disabilities
- Kern Promise
- Veterans

Organizing students into cohorts by affinity group enables BC, through an equity lens, to engage the work of Guided Pathways around students who are disproportionately impacted.

Finally, there was recognition that the work does not begin the day students enroll at BC; it begins at the K-12 level. BC has been **working with the local high schools** in the region to begin introducing the idea of Guided Pathways as early as the ninth grade. Two innovative changes have resulted from this collaboration. First, students can develop an education plan during their freshman year so they can take relevant classes to be prepared when they arrive at BC. Second, high schools are adding courses to ensure students can get an early start on their metamajor in their local schools. BC is also growing its **Early College Program** to enable high school students to take college courses, earn certificates, and even earn an associate's degree while working toward graduating high school.

Initial Results

The transformative change that is taking place at BC is yielding promising initial results. In three years (2013 to 2016), the college improved from only 29 percent of their student population placed in college-level English to 54 percent of students starting at college-level English. Similarly, there was an increase from only three percent of students placed in college-level math to 34 percent of students starting in college-level math. Across the board, they have closed the equity gaps which existed on campus, especially for their African American students. **BC reports that it is quadrupling the chances that African American students will obtain a degree or transfer to a four-year university, rather than get stuck in remedial education courses.**

Guided Pathways is also helping the campus make better use of their resources. Had the campus not moved towards Guided Pathways and using multiples measures for student placement, they would have had to spend an additional $1.7 million just to get students to the transfer-level courses they are taking now. They are increasing student success at a fraction of the cost.

Looking at the big picture, BC is getting more students to earn their degrees in a timely manner while saving taxpayers millions of dollars.

"At BC we have been talking the language of Guided Pathways for a while, but we've been doing the work of student success
for a long time."[6]

- Dr. Sonya Christian
President of Bakersfield College

Irvine Valley College

Irvine Valley College (IVC) is a community college in Orange County that serves almost 15,000 students per semester.[7] With a focus on the transfer-minded student while increasing access to career education, the college is a pioneer in implementing progressive academic support reforms and developing new career education pathways that will help students meet their transfer and/or career goals.

Why IVC Decided to Implement Guided Pathways

After being introduced to state and nationwide completion data on equity gaps and learning more about the impact of a cafeteria-style model of education, IVC's administrators, faculty, and staff decided to learn more about how Guided Pathways could help increase completion, **decrease equity gaps**, and help students more easily understand how to complete their academic and career goals. After attending the six Guided Pathways Institutes run by the American Association of Community Colleges, IVC's administrators and faculty began reviewing internal data and determining the best way to implement system reforms.

Steps Taken to Gain Broad-Based Support on Campus

To begin, the college created a cross-functional leadership team, comprised of faculty, administration, staff, and students. Once established, the leadership team spent approximately two years educating campus stakeholders about Guided Pathways, using their internal data to tell a compelling story about students' struggles with completion and the equity gaps found across programs. To do this, the faculty coordinators visited school and department meetings and held campus-wide Guided Pathways summits. At the summits, students told first-person accounts of their experiences and challenges at IVC, and faculty, staff, and administrators were inspired to join teams to begin tackling some of the problems that surfaced.

Today, there are six **Design Teams** comprised of faculty, staff, students, and administrators to: (1) train data coaches across campus and tackle issues related to equity, (2) better understand the student experience and where roadblocks occur, (3) create degree maps and Interest Areas (IVC's meta-majors), (4) increase and improve campus communication, (5) create completion teams to support students within each Interest Area, and (6) work with K-12 counterparts to help create a smoother transition from high school to college.

The Redesign

Today, IVC is implementing the following:

- **Interest Areas** - Each interest area functions as a meta-major grouping degrees and programs according to prerequisites and core classes.

- **Completion Teams** - A completion team consists of dedicated counselors, discipline faculty mentors, peer advisors, and other campus support professionals tied to an Interest Area.

- **Degree Road Maps** - Degree and program maps have been created for students so they can strategically determine the courses they need to take on a semester-by-semester basis and make personalized academic plans according to their intended academic and career goals and/or target transfer institution.

- **Additional Academic Support for High-Risk and Gatekeeper Courses** - Campus leaders identify high-risk and gatekeeper courses that may prevent students from reaching their goals, implement support specific to the course and student to increase success in these courses, and encourage persistence between courses.

- **Streamlined Onboarding and Communication with Students** - A simplified onboarding process keyed to Interest Areas is being established that combines technological ease with more person-to-person contact with students.

- **Aligned Academic Planning** - Although currently all students must have an academic plan, the college is aligning the academic plans with Interest Areas and degree Road Maps. Undecided students will be provided a recommended first-semester or first-year experience Road Map.

- **Centralized Information and Help Desk for Students** - A centralized location has been created to assist students in finding information, making appointments with appropriate campus services, and providing additional guidance.

- **Extended Support Days and Hours** - Extended hours and additional locations of support services for night and weekend students have been established.

- **Scale the Early Alert System and Proactive Support Measures** - Educate and encourage use of the early alert system by faculty and develop proactive support measures for students involving faculty and student services to increase student success and persistence rates.

Irvine Valley College is truly redesigning the way in which they serve students, and perhaps one of their biggest wins has been gaining cross-campus support for that redesign. Through the combined efforts of faculty, staff, administrators, and students, Interest Areas and degree maps have been created and are in the process of being made accessible to students; Design Teams continue to work across campus; Completion Teams are in development; intrusive support and intervention programs are being developed through the collaboration of student services and faculty; and Guided Pathways has gained support across campus with additional faculty and staff joining the efforts.

Mt. San Antonio College

Mt. San Antonio College (Mt. SAC), located in Walnut, California, is among the largest community colleges in California. Mt. SAC serves a population of over 57,000 students from diverse ethnic, social, and economic backgrounds.[8]

Consistently ranked among the top 10 colleges in the state that transfer students to four-year institutions, Mt. SAC continues to find ways to improve student achievement and ensure students not only transfer and graduate on time but also helps them make progress towards their ultimate goals.

Bringing Guided Pathways to Mt. SAC

Mt. SAC learned of the Guided Pathways model at a national policy seminar where academic leaders gather to discuss how to improve student outcomes at community colleges across the country. The focus of that year's discussion concentrated on how to move the needle across all departments and not just one facet of a school.

President William Scroggins introduced the concept of Guided Pathways to Mt. SAC as a training opportunity for faculty and staff to learn new ways community colleges are approaching student outcomes. He told the staff that "if this isn't right for us, we'll pull out" and invited the administration and faculty to explore how Guided Pathways could shape the future of their college.

President Scroggins first approached the academic services division. He put the platform of the initiative on the table and gave staff an opportunity to go through it themselves. As a result, Guided Pathways was brought "into the classrooms of their college" and embraced, rather than imposed on the school by upper management. Through comprehensive onboarding and educational planning efforts, Student Services was already engaged in various aspects of Guided Pathways and worked in tandem with Instruction to expand the college's Guided Pathways efforts.

Transforming the campus as a whole, rather than creating "boutique" programs, has been the key to Mt. SAC's success. Mt. SAC went immediately to work on what President Scroggins calls, "choke points," the 10 steps students must get through when they enter the community college system. Far too many students do not make it through these steps and either stall or drop out. Guided Pathways addresses these "choke points" by allowing students to start their 10 steps in high school. High school students hoping to enroll in Mt. SAC can now create and map their coursework and majors before they even arrive on campus.

Mt. SAC emphasizes that Guided Pathways is not a change in curriculum, but a change in the structure of guidance and directed support for students. By focusing primarily on what goes on in the classroom, Mt. SAC shifts the conversation to making the college ready for students, rather than the other way around.

The Redesign

It was clear from the beginning that adopting Guided Pathways required complete college participation from all groups, and a key component along the way was the inclusion of students in Mt. SAC's "beta-test" of the program. Implementation started in March of 2016 with a school-wide meeting that brought together over one hundred administrators, faculty, counselors, and students to participate in building coalitions and working groups to understand this new approach.

Jeff Archibald, Academic Senate President, became the lead for overseeing the process. Jeff understood that **this new concept wasn't just any other initiative; it was a platform for how a community college should operate.**

The summit was successful in creating and facilitating an open dialogue between several different departments. It resulted in increased input from faculty, students, and administrators, which, in turn, led Mt. SAC to a variety of other institutional improvements they needed to make Guided Pathways successful.

Guided Pathways felt like the system change that Mt. SAC needed because of the lessons learned from a series of different objectives they implemented. These objectives brought real significant changes to the college structure, including:

- Incorporating a student success inventory in the assessment and course placement process.

- Capitalizing on the college's Student Equity Plan which provided a platform in ensuring all students succeed.

- Collaborating with the Basic Skills Coordinating Committee that helped to strengthen student instruction in order to bring this program to scale.

- Streamlining communications efforts, which allowed faculty, administrators and students to share collective knowledge and improve communications channels between different departments for more clarity.

In Mt. SAC's experience, Guided Pathways has yielded flexible solutions to fit each student's needs and, in the process, brought about an institution-wide transformation rather than "piecemeal changes."

Following a series of meetings over several months, the process of identifying meta-majors and mapping became a priority in April of 2016. The final categories that Mt. SAC determined for their "Career Clusters" are:

Career Clusters

- Arts & Design
- Aviation, Electronics, & Manufacturing
- Business & Information Technology
- Health & Wellness
- Humanities & Communications
- Plants & Animals
- Public Service & Social Science
- Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math (STEM)
- Teaching & Education

Prior to the development of meta-majors, the course sequencing for different programs was unmanageable or distorted for students. Many students found themselves taking unneeded classes and/or taking courses in the wrong order. This kept many students from transferring, causing them to acquire more debt and forcing many to eventually drop out.

Initial Results

Early indicators suggest that Guided Pathways is a success, so far, amongst the Mt. SAC community. The college has been able to **align college entry standards** so that entering high school students have a more informed and clearer pathway into the college, registering for and completing required courses in a timely manner. **Early career counseling** enables students to have choices of career clusters as majors with appropriate required academic courses such as math and English. The result is that students do not find themselves taking incorrect courses and thus enables students to start their college careers with greater confidence and appropriate placement.

Academic support systems are being embedded into the classroom so that those who are struggling are not left behind. **Student success centers** have been developed by career clusters in physical proximity to classes. These success centers provide access to instructional faculty, academic coaches, and peer mentors. One of the most recognizable accomplishments has been the development of a **clear map of course sequences** in each program of study. These maps are embedded into the online student educational planner (DegreeWorks) so that lists of required courses are more accessible to students who are choosing the right courses to transfer and graduate.

"The general ideology of Guided Pathways is only a principle guideline that sets a basis for generic standards. Presidents, Deans, and Provosts need to create a flexible menu to provide students the ability to bring the completion rate to scale, as we did here at Mt. SAC. If this institutional change is going to work, as I know it will, each college should find the right fit for themselves. Different needs for different students," said President Scroggins.[9]

President Scroggins believes that Guided Pathways is not a state initiative, but a local one. He believes that colleges must focus on the concept of teaching and learning so that the students can achieve the goals they set out for themselves to accomplish. Each college and institution must find the right fit when adopting the Guided Pathways model. Students' needs vary across California, as such, Presidents, Deans, and administrators will need to adjust accordingly and create the right Guided Pathways model for their institutions.
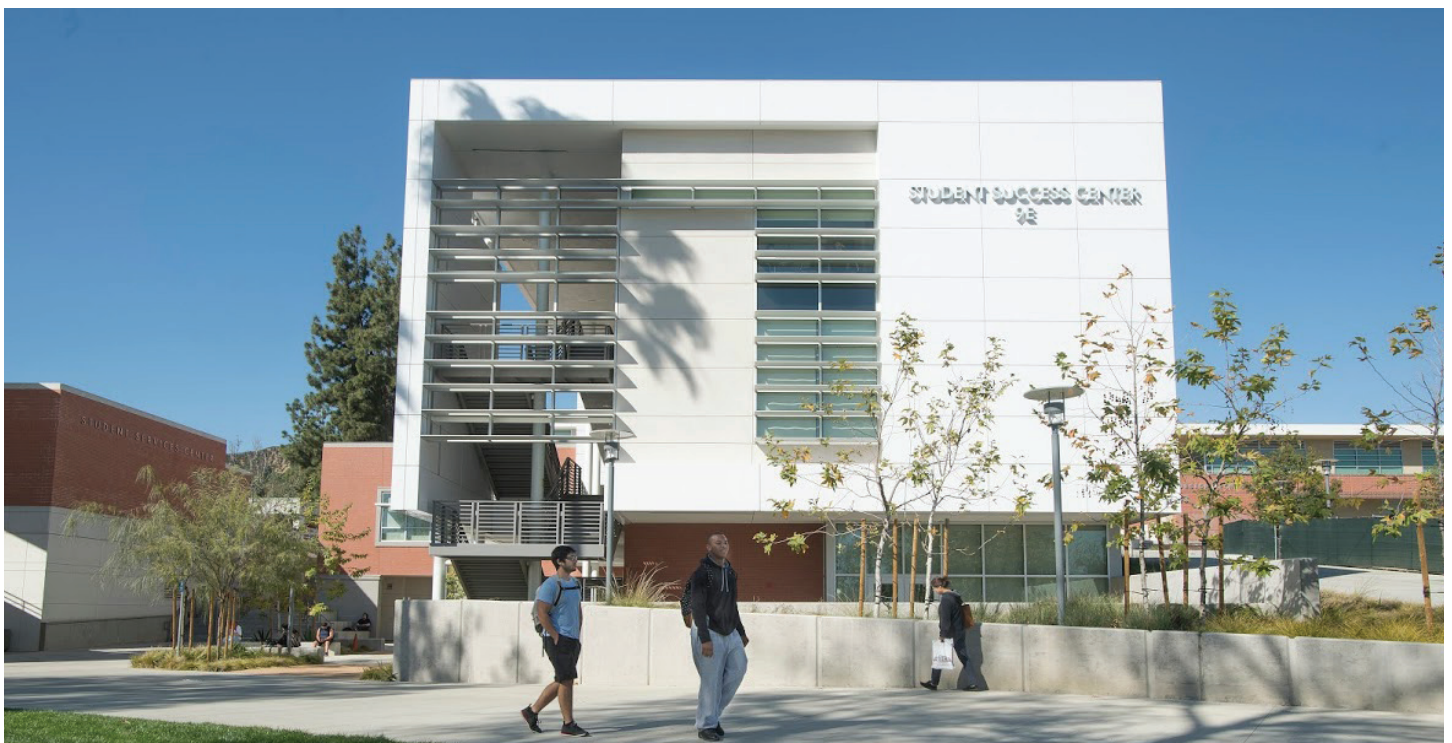
Scaling Guided Pathways

In 2017, California Community Colleges Chancellor Eloy Ortiz Oakley laid out a Vision for Success.[10] The vision identifies ambitious goals to increase the number of students earning an associate's degree or certificate by 20 percent and increasing transfers by 35 percent. The vision also calls for reducing unneeded classes taken by students and reducing racial/ethnic equity gaps by 40 percent within five years and eliminating them all together within ten years.

A core strategy for meeting the goals laid out in the Vision for Success is implementation and scaling of Guided Pathways. In 2017, The California Community Colleges Guided Pathways Award Program was created to provide all 114 campuses with the opportunity to implement Guided Pathways. Thanks to a $150 million budget allocation, colleges can integrate multiple initiatives and scale up effective practices to improve student success.[11] The scaling of Guided Pathways in California combines the work of the Student Success and Support Program, Basic Skills, and Student Equity initiatives.

The Student Centered Funding Formula: Catalyst for Change

Vision for Success provides a clarion call to the California Community College field to better align practice with student progression and completion. Guided Pathways is in service to that clarion call by providing the necessary framework for campuses to maximize student outcomes by establishing clear and intentional roadmaps for students. However, absent a mechanism to align community college funding with these goals, the Vision for Success and Guided Pathways on its own lacks the necessary incentives and commitment to culture change that must urgently take place to make significant progress. The new Student-Centered Funding Formula provides critical alignment of student access, progression, and completion, effectively creating the environment necessary to integrate the Vision for Success, Guided Pathways, and student equity work with funded outcomes. To realize the promise of the Vision for Success and Guided Pathways, policymakers must remain committed to funding and maintaining the Student-Centered Funding Formula and this critical alignment of community college investments with intended progress and completion.

ENDNOTES

Unless otherwise noted, campus data and characterizations of programs and policies came directly from representatives of the respective institutions.

1. Foundation for California Community Colleges. (n.d.) The California Community College System. Retrieved from https://foundationccc.org/About-Us/About-the-Colleges

2. Bailey, T.R., Jaggars, S.S., & Jenkins, D., (2015) *Redesigning America's community colleges: A clearer path to student success*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

3. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2017). Guided Pathways. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/College-Professionals/Guided-Pathways

4. Eikey, R., May, V. G., & Roberson, C. (2017). *Guided Pathways—What are they and where are we going?* Academic Senate for California Community Colleges. Retrieved from https://www.asccc.org/content/guided-pathways—what-are-they-and-where-are-we-going

5. Bakersfield College. (2019) About Bakersfield College. Retrieved from https://www.bakersfieldcollege.edu/about

6. S. Christian & A. Dow, personal communication, February 8, 2017.

7. Irvine Valley College. (2019) Retrieved from http://www.ivc.edu/Pages/default.aspx

8. Mt. San Antonio College. (n.d.) Overview of Introduction. Retrieved from https://www.mtsac.edu/accreditation/college_accreditation/2017/intro01.html

9. W. Scroggins & A. Dow, personal communication, February 16, 2017.

10. California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office. (2017). Vision for Success: Strengthening the California Community Colleges to Meet California's Needs. Retrieved from https://www.cccco.edu/-/media/CCCCO-Website/About-Us/Reports/Files/vision-for-success.ashx?la=en&hash=5512979ABB8B6F4CDF9DFCC93C1F9032157951DB

11. California Community Colleges. (2017). Guided Pathways Report. Retrieved from https://cccgp.cccco.edu/Portals/0/GP_2017-18LegReport_ADA2.pdf

For more information on Guided Pathways, visit http://cccgp.cccco.edu/About-Guided-Pathways

Photos courtesy of Mount San Antonio College, Irvine Valley College, and Bakersfield College.

Acknowledgments

The Campaign for College Opportunity

ONE MISSION: Making College Dreams a Reality

15 Years

www.collegecampaign.org

f @collegecampaign

📷 🐦 @CollegeOpp

SIGN UP FOR OUR NEWSLETTER
bit.ly/CollegeOppNews

BOARD OF DIRECTORS